









ROSE ELMER;  
OR,  
A Divided Heart and a Divided Life.

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH.

It was early on the morning of a lovely day in June, A. D. 1800, that a rather large group of idlers gathered in front of the Etheridge Arms, a quaint old tavern, in the ancient little town of Swinburn, in the west of England.

By their looks and conversation, it was evident that some event of unusual importance was expected to come off.

They were, in fact, awaiting the arrival of the mail coach, which was to bring down Colonel Hastings, and his son Albert, who was the bridegroom elect of Lady Etheridge, Baroness of Swinburn, the last of her race, and sole heiress of the immense wealth, and vast estates of her lovely ancestors.

The nuptials were to be celebrated on the next day; and the retainers and neighbors of the noble bride, who almost worshipped her for her goodness of heart, were anxious to see the man who was to be their beloved lady's husband.

They had not long to wait. The coach soon came thundering up to the door; and as soon as the steps were let down by the obsequious landlord, Colonel Hastings issued forth. He was an elderly gentleman, tall, spare, and stooping; was clothed in a suit of elegant black; and his pale, thin and long face was surrounded by hair and whiskers prematurely gray. He was closely attended by his secretary—Ferdinand Cassinore—an Italian, of such graceful mien and dignified bearing, that he might have been taken for a prince of the blood attended by an old gentleman in waiting.

Next came forth a young gentleman, whose handsome person, and laughing manner, at once attracted general attention. His form was tall and finely proportioned, crowned by a highly head and face, with light, a quinine features, fair and fresh complexion, light blue eyes, and light, flaxen hair. His expression of countenance, in keeping with his whole manner, was stern almost to repellent severity. Great beauty of person, with great dignity of manner, forms a combination very attractive to most young women, and perhaps it was this that fascinated the young heiress of Swinburn Castle, for this was Albert Hastings, the bridegroom elect. He was followed into the house by his valet, leaving his dressing-case.

After a slight report, Colonel Hastings, attended by Cassinore, drove off to the east to have a preliminary interview with Lady Etheridge, (who was his ward), and arrange the marriage settlements. On arriving at the lordly castle Cassinore was shown to a sitting room, while the colonel proceeded to the library, whither his ward was requested to come to meet him.

As the young Italian paced up and down the room, occasionally pausing before a full-length mirror, which reflected the spacious window (reaching from the ceiling to the floor) and the picturesque landscape beyond, suddenly, among the roses outside, glided a purple-draped female figure, that immediately riveted his attention. It was a woman in the earliest bloom of youth. As young Cassinore gazed upon her red-tinted image, as he never gazed upon her, he felt as though a goddess had suddenly descended a winged figure. Her form was a rare the medium height and well rounded. Her head was finely formed, and covered with a profusion of jet black, glittering hair, that was plainly parted over her broad, expansive forehead, and swept around the temples, and wound into a rich and massive knot at the back of the head. Her eyes were large, luminous, dark gray orbs, that seemed, whenever the long veil of lashes was lifted, to throw a light wherever they glanced. Her nose was straight and well formed, and her lips rounded, and like all the rest, full of character. In the carriage of her head and neck, and in her stately foot steps, there was a certain natural majesty that, even in a peasant's dress, would have proved her one of Nature's queens.

dark eyes fixed upon him in royal graciousness, as she said—  
"You are Colonel Hastings' secretary, I believe, sir. Pray sit down. You will find the London papers on that table." And, with a graceful bow, the lady passed him, and seated herself on a sofa at the extremity of the room, took up a portfolio, and was soon deeply engaged with its contents.

After the profound bow with which he had returned her courtesy, Ferdinand Cassinore remained motionless where she had left him. But ten minutes had elapsed since she had glided in among the flowers, and passed him like a vision seen in some beautiful dream. But ten minutes, and like the world, himself, were all changed for Ferdinand Cassinore. He felt, from that moment, that his fate must take its character for good, or for evil, from the will of that royal looking woman.

In the midst of the pleasing pain of his dream the door opened, and a gray-haired servant entered softly, and stepping across the room to where the lady sat, and speaking in a low, subdued tone in which royal personages are addressed said—  
"My lady, and Colonel Hastings' respects, and he awaits your ladyship in the library."

"Very well, Williams; go and say to Colonel Hastings that I will attend him immediately," answered the lady, rising.

This queeny woman, then, was Laura, Baroness Etheridge of Swinburn! Oh, despair! His castle in the air tumbled all about him, and buried all his hopes and aspirations in its fall.

After greeting Colonel Hastings, on her entering the library, Lady Etheridge took a parchment from a drawer in the centre table, and handed it to her guardian. On examining the document, the colonel found it to be a deed of gift, absolute, of her entire magnificent estate, to Albert Hastings, her intended husband. The colonel pretended much surprise, and refused to accept the deed, alleging that such an act might give rise to unpleasant criticism.

"Oh, Colonel Hastings! there can be no question of mine and mine between me and Albert. The deed of gift that transfers all my possessions to my future husband is made out; let it be executed. He shall then never be jealous of his wife's riches, for she will come to him as poor as a cottage girl," exclaimed Lady Etheridge, with a pure devotion of love, flushing her cheek and lighting her eyes.

After protesting somewhat farther against such noble generosity, the colonel allowed himself to be persuaded to accept the deed, and called in Cassinore to witness its execution in due form. The poor secretary would severely hold the pen which the colonel handed him, so great was his agitation. His employer could not help remarking upon the unusually poor signature which the Italian set fixed, as we may, to the deed; but little did the colonel or the business know the terrible passions that were soiling in the secretary's soul, or the important results that they were destined to bring about.

We will now return to the bridegroom elect, whom we left at the Swinburn Arms.

Colonel Hastings had scarcely left the room ere Mr. Albert Hastings arose, stretched himself with a weary yawn, and began to pace thoughtfully up and down the room, murmuring—  
"Men think me a very fortunate and happy man; and, doubtless, an unusual number of good gifts have been showered upon me by the favor of the blind goddess—not the least among them would be esteemed the hand of this wealthy young baroness, my bride expectant. Well, we can not have everything we want in this world, else sweet Rose Elmer only should be the wife of Albert Hastings. Poor girl! she little dreams that the man who has won her, under the name of William Lovell, is really Albert Hastings, the exiled bridegroom of the high born Lady Etheridge of Swinburn. It cannot be helped. I cannot pause for lady's right, or maiden's honor. Here, then, for a divided life; my hand to the lady of Swinburn—my heart to the lovely cottage girl; only Lady Etheridge must never know of Rose Elmer and William Lovell, nor must Rose Elmer know Lady Etheridge and Albert Hastings. And now to persuade Rose to go before me into Wales, where myself and my lady bride are to spend our honeymoon."

And so saying, he took his hat, and strolled out into the street.

Taking a course opposite to that which led to Swinburn Castle, Albert Hastings soon came to a cross-country road, which he followed for some two miles, and then turning into a by-path, he went on until he came to a secluded and lovely cottage. Opening the door of this ele-

gant retreat with a latch-key, he passed in. It was a lovely abode, fit for the home of a fairy. And for a fairy Albert Hastings had had it furnished. The fairy's name was Rose Elmer, and she was the daughter of the village landress. Albert had accidentally met her on one of his visits to the castle, and, as his shyness, given above, shows, had fallen in love with her; and, under the assumed name of William Lovell, had won the beautiful and innocent maiden's heart.

He had had the cottage furnished, and was that morning to meet Rose there, where they had so often met by appointment. Rose came at last; and as soon as the first joyous greetings were over, the intriguing lover set at work to persuade her to consent to a secret marriage; and as he well knew, by a thousand tests of character, that he could never gain his purpose unless Rose believed herself to be his wife. His task was a hard one; but he finally succeeded, by promising that she should stay with her mother just the same, as long as she lived.

This was not at all that Mr. Hastings wished, but neither logic nor eloquence could convince or persuade Rose Elmer to desert her father's mother; and upon no other condition than that of being allowed to remain with her would she consent to the secret marriage.

And, finally, he obtained a promise from Rose that she would meet him at the cottage that same night, where by a previous arrangement, his confidential servant, disguised as a clergyman, was to be in attendance to perform the marriage ceremony. After which, Rose should return to her mother, to remain during the few weeks of his absence in Wales, whither, he said, important business forced him. This agreed upon, they took leave of each other for a few hours, and returned to the village by different routes. Mr. Hastings went to his inn, and summoned his confidential servant to his presence. And Rose Elmer, full of hope and joy, turned down the street leading to her mother's cottage.

When Rose entered the house, there was a smoldering fire in the grate, and beside this fire, in an old arm chair, sat a female, whom no one would have passed without a second look. She was a woman of commanding presence. Her form was tall, and must once have been finely rounded; but now it was worn thin, almost to skeleton meagreness. Her features were nobly chiselled, and might once have been grandly beautiful, but now they were sunken and emaciated as those of death. Under her broad and prominent forehead, a pair of large, dark gray eyes, that burned fiercely with the fires of fever or of frenzy. Her jet black hair, slightly streaked with silver, was half covered with a red handkerchief, tied beneath her chin, and partly fallen in a tangle down one side of her face. A rusty black gown and shawl completed her dress.

As the door opened, admitting Rose, she turned quickly in her chair, fixing her eyes with a look of fierce inquiry upon the intruder.

"How are you now, mother dear? I hope you feel in better spirits?" said Rose, laying off her bonnet, and coming to the woman's side.

"Better. Where have you been? I have waited you."

"I have been—taking a walk through the woods, dear mother; and see, here are some wild strawberries I picked for you on my return. Will you eat them?" said Rose, offering her little basket.

"No; I want none of them. You care little for me."

"Mother, don't say that. You do not know how much I love you."

"Hush, girl, you have little cause—oh!"

And the woman suddenly struck her hand upon her breast, and seemed convulsed by some great agony. Her face worked frightfully, her frame quivered.

"Mother! mother! what is the matter?" exclaimed Rose, throwing her arms around the woman in great alarm.

"It is—pret," gasped the woman, breathing with great difficulty.

the bride as she comes—they love her so well."

"Yes, she is a high and mighty lady; yet, sweet and gracious as beauty one so exalted. Come hither, knee down before me, so that I may take your face between my hands!" said the woman, growing more strange in her talk.

Rose obeyed, and her mother, bowing her own stern, dark face, shut that of the girl between her hands, and gazed upon it wistfully, critically, murmuring—  
"Fair face, delicate features, complexion pure as the inside of a comb shell, white, and flushed with red; hair like fine yellow silk, and eyes blue and clear as those of infancy; hands, small and elegant. I have not let poverty spoil your beauty, have I, my child?"

"No, dear mother, you have let kindness more likely spoil me," said Rose, in simple wonder, at her words.

"I have not let you person grow coarse with hard work, have I, dear?"

"No, mother; not withstanding that I ought to have worked with you, and for you."

"Your hands have never been roughened by helping me in the laundry?"

"No, mother; though they ought to have been."

"No, dear mother, I have been as much as a fine lady, to my shame."

"And I have worked hard to save you from work, and to pay for your schooling, have I not?"

"Dear mother, you have! You have been the best mother in the world, and only too good to me. But I will try to repay you."

"Think of all that to-morrow, child; and when all the country around shudders at my crime, when all the people call down imprecations upon my name, do not you curse one who has nursed you at her bosom, when that bosom is cold in death, and the woman, solemnly."

"Oh! she is not dead!" exclaimed Rose, in dismay, at hearing these words; then lowering her voice, she said, "Mother! mother! try to collect yourself! It is I, your poor daughter Rose, that kneels before you. Do you not know me?"

"Ay, I know you well, and I know what I say," repeated the woman, solemnly.

"Mother! oh, why do you talk so wildly? It is very dreadful! But you are not well—let me get for some one."

"Yes; you must go for some one. You must go to the castle this afternoon," said the woman, in the same tone of deep gravity.

"To the castle? I, mother?" exclaimed Rose, in surprise.

"Yes, you must go to the castle; and when you get there, ask to see her who calls herself Lady Etheridge."

"The baroness! Dear mother, why do you say that? I never knew that before!" interrupted Rose, in surprise.

"There are many things that you never knew my child. But attend! Say to the baroness that Magdalene Elmer is dying!"

"Dying! Oh, mother, do not say so! It is very cruel! You are not sick in bed—you are sitting up! You are not old either, but have many years of life before you."

"Child, tear my words, but do not judge them! Say to Lady Etheridge that Magdalene Elmer, her dying voice, prays—demands—to see her this night! Tell her that I have a confession to make that she must hear to night, or never! Conjure her by all she holds dear on earth! by all her hopes of Heaven! by all her fears of Hell! to come to me to night! Tell her if she would escape the heaviest curse that could darken a woman's life, to come to me to night! to come to me at once! There; get on your bonnet and go!"

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